

PATENT  
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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

TITLE: COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, COMMUNICATION  
DEVICE, SEATING-ORDER DETERMINATION  
DEVICE, COMMUNICATION METHOD, RECORDING  
MEDIUM, GROUP-DETERMINATION-TABLE  
GENERATING METHOD, AND GROUP-  
DETERMINATION-TABLE GENERATING DEVICE

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COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, COMMUNICATION DEVICE, SEATING-ORDER  
DETERMINATION DEVICE, COMMUNICATION METHOD, RECORDING MEDIUM,  
GROUP-DETERMINATION-TABLE GENERATING METHOD, AND GROUP-  
DETERMINATION-TABLE GENERATING DEVICE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to communication systems in which communications are performed among three or more communication devices, the communication devices which constitute the communication systems, and seating-order determination devices. The present invention further relates to group-determination-table generation devices for generating a group determination table used in the seating-order determination devices and the communication methods.

2. Description of the Related Art

In conventional teleconference systems, images and sound generated at a plurality of conference rooms distant from each other are transferred among the conference rooms through a network, and the images and sound sent from the other conference rooms are reproduced at each conference room. This allows a conference to be held as if all participants sat around one table.

In these conventional teleconference systems, conference participants are allowed to talk at the same time

in each conference room.

In an actual conference, in some cases, some conversation groups are made among participants according to the situation of a progress in the conference, and topics are different in the groups. Each group is made tentatively by a part of conference participants for a certain topic, and the group is flexible. More specifically, a conversation group may be made according to a progress in the conference; persons constituting a group may be changed; and one group may be further divided into a plurality of groups. The structures of groups are always being changed.

In the conventional teleconference systems, each participant sees the other participants on monitor devices. Each monitor device corresponds to one participant, and their relationship is fixed. In a conference having six participants, for example, each participant sees the other five participants on five monitor devices. Each monitor device displays an assigned participant. In other words, in a teleconference terminal used by one participant, five monitor devices MDa, MDb, MDc, MDd, and MDe display the other participants HMa, HMb, HMc, HMd, and HMe in an always fixed manner.

Assuming that each monitor device is handled as the seat of the participant corresponding to the monitor device, it can be considered that the order of seats (seating order)

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